

# **A STUDY OF ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS IN STAND-UP COMEDY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research was conducted to discover the types of illocutionary acts, the most dominant type of illocutionary acts, the implication of the dominant type of illocutionary acts, and which utterances show the function of stand-up comedy in stand-up comedy performances in Indonesia. It was based on descriptive design by applying both quantitative and qualitative method. This study took ten performances of stand-up comedy which is taken randomly from the internet and there were 1378 illocutionary acts in ten stand-up comedy selected. The findings show that all types of illocutionary acts were used in stand-up comedy and the percentages were: 55.9% of representatives, 22.9% of directives, 16.2% of expressives, 3% of declaratives and 2% of commissives. There was another function of stand-up comedy in addition to entertaining, informing, and criticizing, which is insinuating. The most dominant illocutionary acts type found was representatives. It means, in delivering their material, the comics dominantly convey their belief that some proposition is true and they also indirectly provoke the audience to believe their words.

**Keywords:** Illocutionary Acts, Stand-Up Comedy.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Background of Study**

Since a long time ago, comedy has become an important part in the civilization of humankind. It is proved by the discovery of the king's servant such Semar, Petruk, and Bagong in the tradition of wayang in Java. Historically, they act as ordinary people who hint at the political and governmental circles through satirical comedy. It can be said that comedy can also be more than just an invitation to laugh. Comedy can be a medium for thinking outside the box about things that happen in everyday life. This is

the point which attempted to be highlighted by stand-up comedy. Stand-up comedy is often called smart humor for demanding the viewers to think logically upon the words they utter. In this case illocutionary acts is importantly needed. Illocutionary Acts is the speech acts which the speakers use to do something. Illocutionary Acts are divided into five types, namely declaratives, representatives, directives, expressives, and commissives. This study will analyze the illocutionary acts in stand-up comedy and will be useful to know how the comics perform illocutionary acts in their utterances when they performing stand-up comedy, how often they produce certain type of illocutionary acts, and from this study the reader will know why one type of illocutionary acts is used frequently than other type of illocutionary acts, and also the function of stand-up comedy.

### **Research Question**

As related to the background of the study, the problems of the study are formulated as the following:

1. What types of illocutionary acts are used in stand-up comedy performances in Indonesia?
2. What is the dominant type of illocutionary acts used in stand-up comedy performances in Indonesia?
3. What is the implication of the dominant type of illocutionary acts which used in stand-up comedy performances in Indonesia?
4. Which utterances in stand-up comedy performances show the function of stand-up comedy?

### **Conceptual Framework**

#### *Pragmatics*

“Pragmatics is the study of speaker meaning. It has more to do with the analysis of what people mean by their utterances than what the words or phrases in those utterances might mean by themselves. Pragmatics is concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader).” (Yule, 1996: 3)

There are some disciplines which covered in pragmatics including deixis, conversational implicature, presupposition, speech acts, and maxim.

### *Speech Acts*

According to Yule (1996: 47), actions performed via utterances are generally called speech acts and, in English, are commonly given more specific labels, such as apology, complaint, compliment, invitation, promise, or request.

According to Austin as asserted by Peccei (1999: 44), there are three kinds of speech acts, namely; (1) Locutionary Acts, (2) Illocutionary Acts, and (3) Perlocutionary Acts.

### *Locutionary Acts*

In locutionary act, the function and purpose of the speech which is spoken is undisputed. So, the speech as “my hand is itchy” for example is solely intended to inform the listener that when the speech is used the hand of the speaker is in a state of itching. (Rahardi, 2005: 35)

This kind of speech acts may be cited as the act of saying something.

### *Illocutionary Acts*

“Illocutionary act is the act in doing something with specific intent and function. This kind of speech act can be cited as the act of doing something. The speech “my hand is itchy” for example is not solely intended to inform the listener that the hand of the speaker is itchy, but moreover that the speaker wants the listener do certain action related to the itchy hand.” (Rahardi, 2005: 35)

This kind of speech acts may be cited as the acts done in saying something.

### *Perlocutionary Acts*

Perlocutionary act carried out by a speaker making an utterance is the act of causing a certain effect on the hearer and others. The perlocution of an utterance is the causing of a change to be brought about, perhaps unintentionally, through, or by means of, the utterance. (Hurford and Heasley, 1983: 22)

It can be cited that perlocutionary acts is the kind of speech acts is the act of causing certain effect on the hearer when the speaker is saying something. For example from the speech “my hand is itchy”, can cause some responses on the hearer, such as, the hearer asks the cause of his itching, the hearer helps scratching his hand, or perhaps the hearer will give a cure for the itchy hand.

This study focused on Illocutionary Acts. Illocutionary Acts is divided into five types and will be explained in the following subsection.

#### *Types of Illocutionary Acts*

Illocutionary acts is divided into five types, namely declaratives, representatives, expressives, directives, and commissives. Each types of illocutionary acts will be explained in the following subsection.

#### *Declaratives*

Declaratives or declarations are those kinds of speech acts that change the world via the speaker’s utterance. The speaker has to have a special institutional role, in a specific context, in order to perform a declaration appropriately. (Yule, 1996: 53)

#### *Representatives*

According to Yule (1996: 53), representatives are those kinds of speech acts that state what the speaker believes to be the case or not. The speaker, in uttering a representative, conveys his belief that some proposition is true.

#### *Expressives*

As Yule (1996: 53) asserted in his book, expressives are those kinds of speech acts that state what the speaker feels. The utterances can be caused by something the speaker does or the hearer does, but they are about the speaker’s experience.

#### *Directives*

According to Yule (1996: 54), directives are those kinds of speech acts that speakers use to get someone else to do something. They express what the speaker wants.

### *Commissives*

Commissives are those kinds of speech acts that speakers use to commit themselves to some future action. They express what the speaker intends. (Yule, 1996: 54)

### *Implication of the Dominant Type of Illocutionary Acts*

Based on the definition of each type of illocutionary acts, it is concluded that there will be some implications of certain type of illocutionary acts, such as the following:

### *Declaratives*

If the dominant type of the illocutionary acts is declaratives, in the case of stand-up comedy, it means the comic is declaring something through his words, which bring a new state of affairs, therefore changing the state of the world by his very own utterances.

### *Representatives*

The type of representatives tends to state what the speaker believes to be the case or not. In the case of stand-up comedy, it means, indirectly, the comic makes statements which he assumes are true and hope that the audience would be affected by those statements.

### *Expressives*

Expressives states the speaker's feeling towards something. If the dominant type of illocutionary acts is expressives, in the case of stand-up comedy, it means that the comic shows his feelings through his utterances.

### *Directives*

In the case of stand-up comedy, if the dominant type of illocutionary acts is directives, it means the comic wanted the audience to do something through his utterances and indirectly hope that the audience do like what he told.

### *Commissives*

If the dominant type of illocutionary acts is commissives, in the case of stand-up comedy, it means the comic commits himself to do something in the future by his own words or the comic guarantee that something is exists in the real world.

### *Comedy*

According to Evanthius in Palmer (1984: 30), comedy is a story treating a various habits and customs of public and private affairs, from which one may learn what is of use in life, on the one hand, and what must be avoided, on the other. It is the mirror of everyday life.

### *Stand-Up Comedy*

“Stand-up comedy is a comedic art form. Usually, a comedian performs in front of a live audience, speaking directly to them. Their performances are sometimes filmed for later release via DVD, the internet, and television. The performer is commonly known as a comic, stand-up comic, stand-up comedian or simply a stand-up.” (Wikipedia)

The comics usually bring material about everyday life, or critics about the social life that delivered in witty way.

“Stand-up comedy is a funny monologue recounts the social phenomena that exist in society. Taking a sample from life and retold to the audience. Stand-up comedy is often referred as smart jokes because it is not shown in slapstick or even insulting. It is called smart because the comics stand alone on stage and required to master the material and have to have a good communication skill.” (metrotvnews.com)

People have to have good understanding and broad vision in order to enjoy stand-up comedy or else they will treat it as a harsh or rude way in entertaining.

### *Function of Stand-Up Comedy in the Using of Illocutionary Acts*

“The main goal of stand-up comedy is just as entertainment. Then gradually develops when the comedian adds an element of satire in the material they convey with a playful manner. Content of bits in stand-up comedy vary depends on the character of each comedian. Most of the comedian talks about his personal observation and experience, some other comedians convey criticism on politics, religion, and race.” (toelanksingo.wordpress.com)

From the above explanation it can be concluded that stand-up comedy aims at entertaining, informing, and criticizing social phenomena by luring the listeners to be able to laugh at the phenomena. These three purposes of stand-up comedy are potential to be realized in any illocutionary acts types, which are declaratives, representatives, expressives, directives, and commissives.

### **Research Methods**

This study was conducted in descriptive design by applying mixed research method. Mixed research is research in which quantitative and qualitative techniques are mixed in a single study. Arikunto (2010: 27) states that as the name implies, quantitative research is required to use numbers, and understanding of the research conclusions would be better if accompanied by tables, graphs, charts, pictures or other display.

Qualitative research is descriptive in that the researcher is interested in process, meaning, and understanding gained through words or pictures. (webspaceship.edu)

The data of this research are the transcription of the stand-up comedy comics' utterances which were taken from the selected videos of stand-up comedy performance in Indonesia. The videos which were uploaded in the internet then transcribed into written language and then they were analyzed based on Searle's theory of illocutionary acts.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### *The Types of Illocutionary Acts Used in Stand-up Comedy*

The data show that all types of illocutionary acts are used in Stand-up Comedy shows. It can be seen clearly in the following table.

**Table 1**  
The Total Number and Percentage of Illocutionary Acts Types

No.	Type of Illocutionary Acts	Total	Percentage
1.	Representatives	770	55.9%
2.	Expressives	224	16.2%
3.	Directives	319	22.9%
4.	Declaratives	42	3%
5.	Commissives	27	2%
<b>Total of Illocutionary Acts</b>		<b>1378</b>	<b>100%</b>

*The Dominant Type of Illocutionary Acts Used in Stand-up Comedy*

The total number and percentage of the illocutionary acts used in stand-up comedy in all selected shows is presented in the following table.

**Table 2**  
The Total of Illocutionary Acts in Each Stand-up Comedy Show

No.	Show	Total Number of Illocutionary Acts					Total Percentage of Illocutionary Acts (%)				
		R	E	Di	De	C	R	E	Di	De	C
1.	First	73	21	29	1	1	58.4	16.8	23.2	0.8	0.8
2.	Second	135	41	44	2	1	60.5	18.4	19.7	1	0.4
3.	Third	56	27	33	4	3	45.5	22	26.8	3.3	2.4
4.	Fourth	81	4	45	3	-	60.9	3	33.8	2.3	0
5.	Fifth	65	24	27	2	1	54.6	20.2	22.7	1.7	0.8
6.	Sixth	59	10	27	4	2	57.8	9.8	26.5	3.9	2
7.	Seventh	42	5	17	3	2	60.9	7.2	24.6	4.3	3
8.	Eighth	82	31	18	2	2	60.7	23	13.3	1.5	1.5
9.	Ninth	55	18	29	5	1	51	16.6	26.9	4.6	0.9
10.	Tenth	122	43	46	16	14	50.6	17.8	19.2	6.6	5.8

Note: **R** = Representatives  
**E** = Expressives  
**Di** = Directives  
**De** = Declaratives  
**C** = Commissives



### *The Implication of the Dominant Type of illocutionary Acts*

The type of illocutionary acts which is dominantly used in the selected stand-up comedy is the type of representatives. The type of representatives tends to explain what is believed by the speakers. Indirectly, the comics made statements which they assume are true and hope that their statements could affect the audience so that the audience is agree with their statements.

### *The Function of Stand-up Comedy in the Using of Illocutionary Acts*

As it has mentioned before, there were three functions of stand-up comedy which were entertaining, informing, and criticizing. These three functions of stand-up comedy were potential to be realized in any illocutionary acts types.

After analyzing all the data, it was found that there was another function in addition to entertaining, informing, and criticizing, which was insinuating. This function is a form of the comedians' resentment on the daily events that aim to intelligently and suggestively provoke listeners so that the listeners interested and realized that something should be changed for the better.

## **Conclusion and Suggestions**

### *Conclusion*

After analyzing and determining the functions of stand-up comedy, the use of illocutionary acts in stand-up comedy performances and also categorizing the types of illocutionary acts, some conclusions are drawn as follows:

1. All types of illocutionary acts were used in the selected stand-up comedy performances. Total number of illocutionary acts was 1378, which consisted of 770 representatives, 315 directives, 224 expressives, 42 declaratives, and 27 commissives.
2. The percentages of each types of illocutionary acts used in the selected stand-up comedy shows are 55.9% of representatives, 22.9% of directives, 16.2% of expressives, 3% of declaratives, and 2% of commissives.

3. The type of illocutionary acts which is dominantly used in the selected stand-up comedy shows was representatives with the total number of 770, and total percentage of 55.9%. In using representatives, the speaker conveys his belief that some proposition is true. Indirectly, the comics hope that their statements could affect the audience, and then they could change their point of view of something according to the materials conveyed.
4. There is another function of stand-up comedy, in addition to the function of entertaining, informing, and criticizing, which is insinuating. Thus, there are four goals of stand-up comedy that was realized in stand-up comedy performances in Indonesia, namely, entertaining, informing, insinuating, and criticizing. All functions of stand-up comedy can be realized in all types of illocutionary acts.

#### *Suggestions*

By considering the conclusions above, there are some suggestions offered:

1. The audience of stand-up comedy show is supposed to have a sense of humor and broad thinking in order to understand the materials provided by the comedian. They also must be able to choose the material which aims to build, and which material is only as entertainment. Moreover, the audience of stand-up comedy show should have to possess noble hearts to take all given statements without being easily offended.
2. Besides the students, everyone is also important to study the types of illocutionary acts, because by understanding this material, it would be easier for them to understand why and for what purpose someone produces an utterance.
3. For other researchers who want to have clearer vision of the types of illocutionary acts application in society or for those who want to make further research about the use of illocutionary acts in society may have this thesis as a reference.

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